

# The Only Way is Forward

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Summary: When a mysterious portal appears at the edge of the Oort Cloud in space, a UNSC fleet is dispatched, only to find themselves in a completely different universe where yet another ancient Galactic threat is upon them. Post Halo 4, ME1.

## 1. Prologue

**\*\*The Only Way is Forward - Prologue\*\***

**\*\*Authors Note: So here I am...First fiction ever, would love any and all criticism of my work (Within reason, of course) Enjoy!\*\***

Quick Timeline:

2552: After delivering the Package to the \_Pillar of Autumn,\_ NOBLE team is left stranded on Reach, and resort to carrying out guerilla tactics on the remaining areas of the planet that were not glassed. They were subsequently picked up and the team made it off the planet alive with no casualties.

Late 2552: Miranda Keyes is seriously wounded, but saved by Sergeant Johnson on the Ark. When on the replacement Halo ring, after defeating Guilty Spark (and subsequently using one of his burning ashes as a lighter for his cigar) Sergeant Johnson and the Arbiter escape Installation 00, but the Chief is left stranded in space.

2556: The MIA \_Spirit of Fire \_is found in poor condition but with much of the crew alive, and after relating their story to HIGHCOM, is hailed as heroes upon their return to Earth, where most of them elect to retire. The surviving SPARTANs and those who did not resign, which included Jerome, Alice, Douglas and an alive and well John Forge, all are transferred onto the \_Infinity \_to both serve with their fellow Spartans as well as for their battle experience against both hostile Flood and Forerunner forces and coming out better for it.

July 2557: After the events of the Battle for Requiem, The Master

Chief is recovered from the wreckage of the Didact's ship, whose body is also recovered. From the ship's technology and the subsequent autopsy of the Forerunner, many medical and technological advances are predicted.

August 2557: Using technology reverse-engineered from Forerunners, scientists are able to reactivate Cortana, who has reached a stage of Meta-Stability or true sentience. The technology and her state guarantees that she will never be undergo rampancy ever again. Master Chief is greatly moved by the revival of his long time companion, and becomes Commander of the remaining SPARTANS on the Infinity along with Sarah Palmer and Carter, who has also joined the Infinity crew, and runs a trio-based command with each personally leading the remaining SPARTAN-IIIs, one of the various SPARTAN-IV fire teams, and NOBLE team in battle, respectively. Avery Johnson is onboard to personally see the Chief, and becomes an advisor and training sergeant to the SPARTANS. Note: Despite his promotion he is still commonly known by his former title, which has become something of a nickname for him.

2557: Admirals Margaret Parangosky and Serin Osman of ONI are arrested for crimes against another species and endangerment of humanity, as well as the illegal ordered execution of Dr. Catherine Halsey. She is pardoned and cleared of any and all charges against her, as they were deemed necessary in the fight against insurrectionists and Covenant. She resumes her work onboard the Infinity, and is popularly known among the crew for a sign in front of her lab door threatening to shoot anyone who interrupts her while she is working.

2558: Among the many Tech and Medical advancements, the secret of Nano-technology is cracked. Doctors and scientists hail it as one of the greatest advancements of the decade while some call it the discovery of the century. The nanites reverse the aging process so that despite their actual age physically they will be at their peak of around their 20s, as well as the incredible ability for most wounds to heal triple the rate in normal humans, and even faster for the augmented SPARTANS. Due to the relatively low cost, and despite initial hesitance to use them, are quickly implanted in society. All military personnel are required to use them, including SPARTANS.

2559: Upon a visit to a new untouched Forerunner world, which is revealed to be the Forerunner home world, the surviving constructs recognize the ship as members of the Reclaimers, with Master Chief being held in particularly high regard as the one that defeated the Didact, and as such has assumed his title. Using this knowledge, the remaining constructs share much technological wonders, marvels and secrets with humanity, propelling them to unprecedented heights and unparalleled military power. New technology is applied to the Infinity, such as new weapons and vehicles as well as armaments and defensive technology, with one of the many highlights being a cloaking system that could completely conceal the entire ship. The sister ship of Infinity and the second of her class, the Eternal, is also completed this year, with the now Admiral Keyes assuming command.

2560: At the dawn of a new decade, a mysterious anomaly at the edge of the Oort Cloud is detected, and the Infinity, with a full crew complement and equipment and supplies for a decades long journey and

production capabilities to make more, sets out as head of an official UNSC expedition, with some of the UNSCs best sent along. ONI operatives are assigned to the ships as well, including the new head of ONI Veronica Dare. Most information on the expedition remains on need-to-know basis.

## 2. Once more Unto the Portal

### \*\*Chapter One " Once more unto the Breach\*\*

"Commanders Carter, John, and Sarah Palmer to the bridge, please." An automated voice blared out for what seemed like the millionth time in the Chief's mind. He was walking towards the bridge with Kelly alongside him to keep him company. Under most circumstances, he would have Fred and Linda alongside them, but currently they were showing off in the War Games competition, most likely beating up the SPARTAN-IVs single-handedly. While it wasn't necessarily protocol to bring a subordinate officer to staff meetings, John had done it more than once simply because the others usually found out about it anyways, and it was easier for them to learn it the first time rather than forcing him to repeat what he had heard. Cortana, however, interrupted this train of thought.

"Have I ever mentioned that you and Kelly would make a great couple?" She coyly asked, intentionally broadcasting it between their helmets. At once, the former Master Chief inwardly groaned while Kelly instinctually turned away to hide a blush that nobody save Cortana could see.

"Only for the seventh time, Cortana." This had recently become something that had become a running gag between Blue team, as recently Fred and Linda had declared that they were officially in a relationship, or as close to a relationship as possible for Spartans. That really meant some handholding here, a hug there, and maybe a kiss somewhere in private, but it was still enough material for Cortana to tease John with about how the only company he had for a while was her and that if he didn't ask out Kelly soon, he'd become a "Crabby old man" who in her rather colorful description said would become a hermit and end up like Halsey, threatening to shoot anyone who came in the door. John ostensibly refused at first, but regardless he realized that he had become much closer to Kelly than anyone else save perhaps Catherine Halsey and Cortana herself.

She also wasn't necessarily bad-looking either; If anyone asked, John's honest answer would be that Kelly was quite attractive, with long brown hair that was far beyond regulation length that she didn't bother cutting, pale skin from years of wearing armor as a second skin, and a snarky, sarcastic and often humorous attitude that regardless the situation John always secretly smiled at. It wasn't a matter of emotion " he had already worked through his " but rather his non-existent social skill that prevented him to ask her out. Cortana laughed upon hearing this explanation, saying, "You've faced down entire Covenant and Promethean armies. You've saved humanity from extinction at least three times and cheated death for over five years. Are you telling me you don't have the courage to ask a pretty girl out? Because if so, Chief, I'm sorry to say you've still failed the game of life."

Shaking himself out of that train of thought, he continued his brisk

walk to the bridge, listening in to a conversation that the two guards at the bridge door were having.

"â€|I don't like it, man. An entire armada gets sent out as an 'Expeditionary force' to just one anomaly. Add the fact that there are ONI spooks everywhere, and something just doesn't add up."

"Relax man, you're overreacting. Plus, if something did happen, we'd be fine. We got over 300 SPARTAN-IVs stationed onboard, plus every last SPARTAN-I and II in existence. They even pulled out those guys from Gray Team to help if we need it."

"No, that's what I mean! Those guys never come back to HIGHCOM unless something really big is happening, and I know it is. I feel it in my bones."

"Yeah, you said the same thing at the poker game last night, and now you got an extra patrol shift as a result."

"Screw you." At that timely moment of the conversation, Chief and Kelly rounded the bend, and both marines smartly snapped to attention and it looked as if the conversation had never happened, with the one with the extra shift calling out, "Commander on deck!"

"At ease, kid." Chief waved his hand, and both relaxed. He and Kelly entered, and through their sensitive hearing, heard one whisper to the other, "That was close!" before the door shut again.

By this point, Both Palmer and Carter had arrived, and John nodded in greeting. While Palmer had an impressive service record, it was Carter who garnered the respect and admiration of most of the SPARTANS. A born leader, even Palmer and Chief deferred to him when tactical â€" or even moral â€" decisions hit the squad, and he was among many things a skilled negotiator, tactician, and had that aura of power around him that motivated others â€" Spartan or not â€" to unprecedented levels of efficiency, the natural leadership that drove those around him to greatness. He had met him once before, when extracting Reach and CASTLE base, and the fact that he had managed to get a disparate group of soldiers from various backgrounds and personalities to become one of the deadliest fighting forces the UNSC has known while at the same time getting everyone out of Reach alive was one of the most incredible feats John had ever seen.

Former Captain Lasky was now Admiral Lasky, and had assumed the Infinity as his personal warship. He gave another curt nod to him, and with the new Nano-technology used throughout the UNSC, Master Chief noticed how much younger he looked in age. He still had that hardened look only a grizzled veteran had in his eyes, that was for sure, but at the same time he looked better than he had been back in 2557, when Lasky was under constant stress from dealing with one of the most dangerous threats to mankind they had known â€" the Prometheans. He came out of the experience much more experienced and wiser â€" nothing like the brash, irrational kid that had risked his life back at Corbullo Academy all those years back, but still holding that determination and willingness to sacrifice that made him a capable leader.

He merely nodded in the direction of Veronica Dare, the head of ONI, and Commander Buck of the ODSTs, but to his surprise he saw Dr.

Halsey among them too. It was a rare treat when Halsey ever left her labs in person, as she usually just sent a hologram. When she did, however, the event was of great importance, which it certainly was now. Although both John, Kelly and frankly the rest of the SPARTAN-IIs still regarded her as a motherly figure, he couldn't help but be a little unnerved at the fact that with the new technology, she seemed to have aged quite well for someone 68 years old, looking as if she was like almost everyone else in her mid-twenties, making the connection between Cortana and her all the more obvious. Personally, she was fascinated when she discovered that her mechanical counterpart had managed to achieve the impossible with meta-stability, but unfortunately for some it inflated her ego as she believed that she was so great even AI modeled after her accomplished great feats.

Admiral Lasky cleared his throat, and spoke first. "So I'm guessing most of you save for Veronica and Halsey as well as myself are wondering what is going on. We have detected an anomaly near the Oort cloud, yes, but what we've discovered â€" may be interesting. Dr. Halsey, if you would?"

"Yes, Admiral, I think I shall, thank you very much." She replied. She approached the holographic table they gathered around, and after punching in a few buttons, an image appeared, a large, smooth orb that was simply floating in the middle of nowhere.

"Looks like some kind of slip space portal, does it not? We've discerned the use of the anomaly, and while it does indeed look like a portal, it doesn't exactly transfer you anywhere around here.." Halsey said. She brought calculations, probe findings, reports from scouting ships around it. None of it seemed to make sense to the rest of the table, so Halsey clarified. "These are findings about the portal that we have noticed. Although it functions similarly to the normal slip space portal, there are many algorithms and calculations that are drastically different, which would normally tear a ship apart, howeverâ€"|" She brought up another screen, and continued her narration. "We sent a probe through it, and interestingly enough, it actually began sending back data, and from that we can conclude that we are looking at an alternate dimension portal."

Silence reigned for a few moments on the bridge save a few beeping consoles, and Palmer broke it by asking, "Alternate universe. Is this some kind of joke, Halsey?" Raising an eyebrow in suspicion.

"You of all people should know that I rarely joke, Mrs. Palmer. Besides, I can confirm it does because I believe that ONI already sent a Prowler through it, haven't they?" Halsey replied, staring at Dare with a withering gaze that has often broken most men. Dare suddenly seemed very interested about the floor for a few moments, then spoke up, "We did. Although I will have to ask you about how you intercepted those transmissions, we have already sent a Prowler through, and they have confirmed a way back for us, should we decide to enter."

Sarah Palmer spoke up again, "And why, pray tell, should we do that?" she asked, the hot-headedness in her voice evident. While it was irrational (and potentially suicidal) she had a dislike of the Doctor, enough that she wanted to argue with her on every matter she could, and even without that irrationality she still thought that going through the portal made no sense to her, as it needlessly put

thousands of lives at risk.

"Because, \_Mrs. Palmer\_, " and Halsey spoke this time with a condescending tone, "You should know that the \_Infinity\_ is a exploration and expedition vessel designed for this very purpose! The only two groups with the power to create a self-powered portal like this are the Forerunners and the Precursors, so whatever is on the other side might be priceless for us!" Catherine nearly shouted out the last part, making everyone to cringe. When Halsey tended to lose her temper, it was usually best to stay out of her way, as an unfortunate Dr. Glassman once found out when he entered her lab without permission. The results ended up with a wounded Glassman in the Med bay for two non-lethal shots to the chest, and a stern warning from Roland. However, nobody dared to take up charges against her as she had become so powerful that she could literally threaten anyone and get away with it, and the UNSC decided that it was better to have her on their side and just be grateful about it.

Lasky sighed. "Our orders were to investigate the portal and if possible use it to goâ€|wherever it plans to lead us. We have a full complement of 56 ships â€" the \_Infinity\_, \_our ten \_Strident\_ heavy frigates, The \_Infinity\_'s sister ship \_Eternal\_ and her ten heavy Frigates, 11 \_Paris \_class, 11 \_Stalwart \_class light frigates, and 12 \_Autumn \_class cruisers. We have enough manpower, equipment and weapons to wage a war for decades if need be. We still need to inform the rest of the fleet, but other than that, we already have the green light. We should be ready at any moment."

For a second there was silence reigning in the air, and the helmsmen of the \_Infinity \_calling out, "Sir, we're ready to get underway, but some of the other ship captains want answers. Should I patch you through?"

Admiral Lasky straightened himself from his bent over position, and he made his way to the intercom button. "Put me on. Fleet-wide channel." He took a deep breath as the intercom flared to life, and to him it seemed as if time stilled for a few precious seconds as he thought of what to say and what not to reveal.

"This is Admiral Lasky broadcasting to UNSC fleet group \_Pioneer.\_ For those of you who don't know why were here, just listen. I'm about to tell you."

Most people, throughout the fleet, simply stopped what they were doing, or at the very least slowed down â€" Engineers, Marines, Doctors, and Pilots â€"to listen in on what many believed to be a historic moment.

"We've discovered a portalâ€|what kind of portal it is, I quite frankly don't know, and while there are theorists much better qualified than I to explain, the basis is that it could lead to some sort of alternate dimension, or universe. As part of an expeditionary and exploratory fleet, its our duty go through it and find out what is on the other side. I won't lie to you; although the scientific teams and eggheads all assure me otherwise, there is always the chance that we might not come back."

"But that isn't the point. We all knew the risks when we first enlisted, and any second thoughts you might have had are for later. We are on yet another discovery that could send humanity another 100

years into the future, perhaps farther than that. I hope to god that we make it through and that we will make it back. Lasky out."

Slowly, the \_Infinity\_ and its escorts all made their way through the portal one by one, until all fifty-six disappeared.

### 3. The New Frontier

#### \*\*Chapter 2 " A New Frontier\*\*

"Status report?" Lasky asked, to no one in particular. He knew what he had just done was unprecedented in all of UNSC history, and he had to make sure that the \_Infinity\_ and the ships she was responsible for were safe. Immediately, he was answered by two deck officers both calling out.

"All ships are reporting in Admiral."

"Minor drain on the shields, but other than that, all systems green."

Lasky sighed, \_at least that part of the journey worked.\_ "So can anyone tell us where the hell are we? Cortana? Bias? Roland?"

Instantaneously three different AIs appeared. While most recognized the two more human names, only a select few knew the middle one. 05-032 Mendicant Bias was an ancient Forerunner AI old beyond measure, older than all the ships, men and women of the entire fleet combined, most likely. He was discovered having hitched a ride in the \_Forward Unto Dawns\_ cockpit, and as part of his eternal quest for repentance, he has agreed to assist the UNSC wherever necessary. Although initially hesitant to trust a formerly rampant AI, he has proven invaluable with the knowledge and data he has provided, but he often sometimes tended to abruptly and suddenly withdraw into himself, sometimes for days, often not responding to outside stimuli. While there were numerous theories, the best were ones explained by his AI companions, who revealed that he often suffers from terrible "Mood swings" that are caused by the incredible guilt of being the death of an entire species.

This time, thankfully, he had reappeared in his usual form, which was really just a holographic version of his original physical shell, a Teardrop shaped casing with three eyes and a strange glyph in the center. While Cortana and Roland would never admit it, his processing power far outweighs either of theirs combined. He was the first to speak. "Hmmâ€¦ From what I've gathered, there appears to be some sort of communications relay nearby, and I've already hacked into it. Their encryption is incredibly weak, primitive even by your standards, but I've already downloaded a version of what they call a 'Codex.' I suggest you and your men get ready to read a lot, as this universe isâ€¦ quite different than ours." He pulled up four different pictures, one of humans, and three that nobody recognized. "Suffice to say, there are four predominant races in this galaxy, who all utilize one particular brand of technology known as Mass Effect fielding, one whichâ€¦"

The explanation did not only suffice, it took three hours. Mendicant

not only explained some of it, but also pointed out flaws in their tech, noted their abhorrence of AI, and generally added his own running commentary whenever he could. One deck officer even fell asleep, and Lasky was barely awake himself once it was over. However he and the other military personnel such as the Spartans dutifully committed as much as they could of it to memory, as they never knew when one piece of information in a hostile environment could mean the difference of life and death.

The other AI were also incredibly interested in what they had learned, but because they absorbed information at a much faster rate and could simply have a sub-process to take in all that they learned, both Roland and Cortana decided to have a chess marathon, with a running tally on the side of the table. It currently had Cortana winning with 3651 wins, 6021 draws, and 3624 losses, as while Cortana was more experienced and had many upgrades that Roland did not have, Roland was a later generation AI and was able to pull off some moves of his own. Their holographic images showed them lounging at a table, the chessboard moving faster than the human eye could follow.

It was Halsey who had seemed to be the most interested in this new universe. She had practically taken up half the table with various notes she was scribbling down, absent mindedly listening to Bias but mostly looking at her own personal codex she downloaded to her data pad, mostly things that she could work with, maybe improve the UNSC with, etc.

Three hours later, while most of the crew aboard the ships were all reading through their versions of the codex, Mendicant Bias abruptly stopped his lecture, stating, "I seem to be recovering a distress call from a planet on the other side of the system. One moment, please!" A holographic image appeared, with what was obviously a helmet camera of a soldier in battle, if the dust and debris flying around were any giveaway. One soldier shoved the viewer to the ground and told him/her to get down, while an officer who was obviously human shouted out, "We are under attack! Taking heavy casualties, I repeat: heavy casualties! We can't!argh...need evac! They came out of nowhere. We need-!" the officer was thrown away from the camera, and a strange noise halfway in-between a buzz and a hum was heard, a gigantic tentacle-like mechanical hand that was at least 2 kilometers in length appeared, and then abruptly the feed cut out.

"I detect no other communications traffic from the planet. It appears that someone or something is blocking it."

Everyone was riveted to the screen, and it was Chief who first spoke up. "Reverse and hold the transmission at 38.54 seconds, if you can." The screen briefly sped up backwards for a second, and came to the image of the strange machine hand. Everyone recognized the form and shape of the ship, but it was only in the Chief, Cortana and Bias that it inspired true dread.

"It looks like!" Palmer started.

"The Flood." Chief finished. He knew in his gut instinct that whatever universe this was, they needed to get out there and save those people, \_fast.\_

"How quickly can we deploy a squad?" Lasky asked.



Cortana replied, "Blue Team is standing by and awaiting orders as we speak, Sir."

"Good. Get them to the shuttle bay and have a Pelican ready. Things just got a lot more complicated."

**\*\*Pelican 931 â€" 1 minute out until drop point\*\***

"ETA one minute, ladies and gentlemen. Double time your preparation." Hocus called out from the cockpit.

All seven Spartans of Blue Team â€" Which now also included Jerome, Alice and Douglas â€" double-checked all of their weapons and ammunition one last time. All of them were armed with the now standard issue Mark VII MIJOLNIR armor, along with two M7S SMGs with extended barrels instead of silencers. But that was where the Spartans began to be equipped differently. John carried his usual MA5D, and had a Light Rifle slung across his back with a classic M6D magnum strapped to his side. People could drone on all they wanted about how the "Newer" versions were more advanced, but nothing quite packed the same punch in his mind.

Kelly, as their CQC specialist, had an M90A tactical shotgun and Scattershot, and Fred carried a Battle Rifle along with a Beam Rifle, as the team's second best sniper. Instead of his trademark combat knives, he had an energy sword gifted to him after the war once he won a duel with an Elite. After much deliberation on her part, Linda finally decided to go with the brand new Binary rifle ("To see if it stacks up against the old models" was her only explanation, her only trials with it in the simulation so far), along with a pistol for a sidearm. Jerome had a Spartan Laser clipped to his back, and carried a DMR, and Douglas had a SAW with a Rocket Launcher also clipped to his back and Alice carrying her traditional chain gun and another human assault rifle. All in all, they would probably be the deadliest things their enemies have ever seenâ€¦if any of them were alive to tell the tale.

"Sir, We've arrived at the drop point, but I think your AI put in the wrong destination." Hocus said, looking down.

"And what makes you say that?" Fred shouted over the wind.

"Because we happen to be several thousand feet in the air, pal, I don't think-"

"Who said this was the wrong place?" Kelly shouted, before promptly jumping out. John secretly rolled his eyes underneath his helmet, as this was often becoming a habit on Kelly's part. He quickly followed her, as did the rest of the team in a High Altitude, Low Opening jump, or a HALO. They didn't carry parachutes and they didn't need any; they were going to use jetpacks to soften the landing if need be. He quickly sped up fast enough to catch up to Kelly, and over his helmet communicator he said, "You know that was a bad idea, right?"

Kelly simply shook her head no, and in a sarcastic, if teasing voice replied, "I have no idea what you're talking about."

Chief was trying to come up with a equally snarky response when Cortana cut in saying, "Look, as funny as it is seeing two living

tanks flying through the air trying to flirt with each other, I think we found a survivor from the Distress call."

She pulled up an image of a woman in white and pink armor being chased by what looked like drones and robots right out of some scene in a 21st century sci-fi film. "I can calculate a course correction there, if you want?"

"Do it."

**\*\*Groundside â€" Eden Prime\*\***

Ashley Williams was currently having one of the worst days of her life right now. Not hours before, her entire unit was completely eradicated for all intents and purposes, and she'd been fighting ever since. Right now she was being harassed by a pair of drones and what felt like an entire Geth platoon behind her, and she turned around at the last moment to aim at the drones with her pistolâ€|

Only to see some massiveâ€| \_Thing \_crush it first, seemingly coming out of nowhere to stomp the thing to the ground. Six others soon followed, hulking green giants in huge armor with weapons that Williams had never seen before. Whether it was shock or fear of these new... things that kept her on the ground she didn't know, but she watched in amazement (and a little bit of awe) as they tore up the entire platoon with shocking feats of strength. One seemed to be lifting a chain gun bigger than Ashley was, and he/she/it revved it up and tore apart four different geth soldiers in one go, and continuing forward. Another was carrying what appeared to be a classical 20th century pump-action shotgun, and she heard the pump rack and he/she/it fired at a destroyer, one of the toughest models of geth, and it went straight through its shields and it crashed to the ground. Rather than pumping it again, she flipped the gun around and grabbed it by the barrel, like a baseball bat. She then proceeded to do a swing against a geth hunter behind her, and there was a sharp \_crack \_as the unit flew back at least 30 feet.

Another carried a strange orange rifle; one that looked like it was from the future (Which unknown to her actually was) and when it fired, it fired an orange pulse that just \_dissolved\_ one geth into orange digital parts. She observed one with some kind of knife or sword made out of bright energy slice another geth into three pieces so quickly she didn't even realize until the platform neatly fell apart.

Within 30 seconds, the geth were completely leveled, with only smoking bits and pieces left behind. "Area secured." One called out. Another walked toward where Ashley was on the ground, the one with the energy sword, and extended a hand toward the Gunnery Chief. On his armor were the painted numbers \_104.\_

"Are you wounded, ma'am?" He asked, for his voice was obviously that of a man. Ashley took his arm, and he lifted her up as if she were paper.

"Yeahâ€|I'm just fine, thanks. If you guys had shown up a few seconds later, I think I would've been a goner for sure. I saw you guys level the field, though. Where are you guys from?"

The human â€" \_if \_he was a human â€" ignored and asked her in reply,

"What's your name and rank, soldier?" Realizing that she was probably overstepping her boundaries and in the presence of a ranking officer, she snapped to attention. "Gunnery Chief Ashley Williams of the 212th, sir. I'm the only one left in my unit, I think" What's your name?"

"Sierra-104, but I guess you want a name" Just call me Fredric."

So the gigantic, seven foot tall giant is named Fred? Ashley thought incredulously, but just then two Alliance soldiers came out, one man and woman, obviously prepared for a fight but totally unprepared by the sight that followed of an entire geth platoon smoking in ruins and seven huge unknowns milling around. Instantly reacting to the threat, all of them immediately turned and pointed their weapons at them, most still smoking at the barrel. There was a tense moment until one of the Alliance soldiers called out, "Easy there, ladies and gentlemen. We're all here to fight geth, not other humans."

Jerome was the one to reply, and with classical laconic wit, tersely asked, "Name and Rank."

"Commander Shepard of the SSV Normandy of the Alliance" Sir." The woman stiffly replied. In a way, the way she spoke reminded her of Sarah Palmer, only if they were facing Palmer she would've shot first and asked questions later. "And who the hell are you guys?" She shot back, obviously curious. All of them called out their name as if it were practiced.

"John."

"Fredric."

"Linda."

"Kelly."

"Jerome."

"Douglas."

"Alice."

"Listen, we're not exactly" from around here. We'll explain it all once the geth are eliminated, but for now, you'll just need to trust us." Jerome asked, but even those two small sentences were leaps and bounds more than usual Spartan etiquette dictated, adding the fact that they just had to reveal their names to complete strangers, which to a Spartan was the ultimate sign of trust. All of them got ready to move once again, jamming new clips into their guns if necessary, which only piqued the curiosity of the Alliance members. Magazine fed weapons were usually antiques, but at the same time it was obvious that these were deadly, futuristic weapons. They were just about to leave when the man called out, "Are you crazy? With magazine fed guns and you're going up against the whole colony? There must be hundreds of geth crawling around as we speak."

This time, a feminine voice from another " the one with the chain

gun " merely nodded and said, "Only a few hundred. If you all happen to be going somewhere, stay behind us."

They continued marching out, and Shepard hurriedly told Kaidan, "Well, looks like we made a few new friends. A few huge, 7 foot tall super soldier friends, but nevertheless friends."

"What about the beacon, commander?" Kaidan asked, confused. \_Wasn't that our original objective?\_ He inwardly thought.

"Does it look like there is a beacon there, Kaidan?" Kaidan simply looked to where the beacon should have been, then shrugged.

"I guess there isn't one now."

Ashley decided to introduce herself, repeating what she said to the super soldiers, and then said, "Look ma'am, whoever those guys are, they want to help. Lets see what they do."

Shepard looked at them, and it seemed in the 5 seconds she looked away the mystery soldiers had ran halfway across the canyon by then. She shrugged, and began running after them.

If Shepard had been more impressed by the following sights, she would have been in actual shock. Although she ran by the dig spot and saw no beacon, she reasonably came to the conclusion that it must have been moved by the geth somehow, and simply continued to chase after the Spartans who despite carrying gear and wearing armor which must have weight several hundred pounds were running faster than she could. They continued to mow down geth left and right, but they didn't bother stopping; they just took a few shots that looked like they weren't even trying while consistently hitting their targets and moving on. At one point, there were two Rocket Geth troopers that had managed to surprise them. One of the new guys took a direct rocket to the face, but a golden layer appeared over them and he just aimed a purple rifle at it and the beam killed the light on its head. The other also fired, but to Shepard's disbelief, he \_slapped\_ away the missile and managed to fire two bursts in the Rocket trooper's direction. Unlike her squad, they didn't even seem fazed by the Dragon Teeth, merely shooting the husks before they even descended from the pikes and moving on.

Abruptly, however, the entire came to a halt so fast Shepard nearly collided into one. There was a sharp \_crack\_ of a louder than usual gunshot, and one of them automatically said, "Gunshot. Over the ridge, sounds like a pistol caliber." Another, John she remembered, asked, "Possible explanations?"

"Most likely a surprise attack, or an execution."

The reasoning baffled Shepard for a moment. "Wait, you can tell just from one gunshot?"

The one who talked, Kelly, made a shrugging motion. "There was only one shot, so it obviously meant that whoever was the shooter, he wasn't fighting enemies, because all the robots and husks we've seen were all in packs, so he was likely executing somebody or something, or it was a surprise." She cocked her head to the side, as if listening intently, and continued, "There also isn't the sound of a struggle, or more gunshots or screaming, so there obviously isn't

anybody left to fight. Simple."

The line of thought and how quickly this seemingly mech-like soldier came to its conclusion bothered Shepard more than it should have, but regardless she accepted the explanation, as it made sense.

When they got there, it was obvious whom the gunshot was fired at. A familiar turian body lay dead, a look of what appeared to be shock or surprise on his face.

"Commanderâ€¦ It's Nihlus." Kaidan said. Douglas immediately knelt next to the body and examined it, and quickly discovered a hole in the back of its head, blood still fresh. He calculated how the bullet would've entered, and made his conclusion. He shook his head slightly in Jerome's direction, and he said what Douglas meant.

"This man was caught by surprise with a pistol shot to the back of the head. He was still standing, as the bullet fired in a straight line, not angled if the alien were kneeling down. It didn't appear to put up a fight. You knew it?"

"Yeah, and he had a name." Shepard retorted, but she took in his theory. In the split-second she looked away, Douglas quickly snatched the strange tool on the alien's left arm, and accessed what he could from it, which was an information gold mine. Classified data, personal upgrades, and best of all millions of this universe's credit chits, completely unguarded, enough to resupply the entire expeditionary force if need be with raw materials and goods they couldn't get anywhere else. Through his helmet COM, he quickly requested that Cortana look through the information he found.

Suddenly, a new voice called out. "Wait, I saw what happened. I saw everything. Promise." A man coming from behind a few crates where he had obviously been hiding came out, nervous and slightly shocked by the seven strange figures standing around. He tried to speak, but the only thing he did was wet his lips slightly in nervousness. A soldier who looked decidedly more human than the others stepped out and told him, "Relax. The big guys are with us. What happened?"

"W-well, I'm a dock worker. Name is Powell. I was hiding earlier when the attack hit, and I saw two turians. One on the floor now, another silvery looking one with a fake arm. They seemed to know each other. Your buddy there took down his guard, relaxed a littleâ€¦ Then, when he wasn't looking, the other just offed him. Bam, just like that. The other just walked away and onto the tram station, and then sped off. I'd been trying to avoid those geth ever since."

John was still suspicious of the dockworkers story, however. "How'd you see all this without getting caught?" he asked, making sure to put an extra layer of intimidation into his voice. It worked, as when the dockworker looked into his visor, he quailed at the sight.

"E-err, Iâ€¦ well, I was tiredâ€¦ and I dozed off." Despite telling the truth, Powell didn't feel better. In fact, looking at that reflective golden visor, he saw his entire life flash before his eyes until he broke eye contact.

"You people make me sick." The former Master Chief didn't bother to

hide the disgust in his voice, but nevertheless the information was vital. There were two non-synthetics in a obviously human colony, one who was apparently allied with their alternate universe counterparts and now dead on the floor. Whoever this person was, they needed to bring him to justice.

"C'mon, there are still a few trams left. We can catch one and get this guy before he escapes, but we need to get there now."

"Aye, aye, Chief."

\*\*Whew! So there you have it. This was mostly written before the first reviews, so I'm sorry if there are a few errors here and there, but overall I'd really like to thank the first five reviewers, you guys have been awesome in your feedback and I'd love to hear more from you.\*\*

#### 4. Rally point Alpha

\*\*Chapter 3 " Rally Point Alpha\*\*

\*\*Disclaimer: Surprise, I obviously don't own Bioware, EA, Bungie, Microsoft, 343, or any of the other copyrighted companies, blah blah blah, because obviously if I did I wouldn't be writing fanfiction here I'd be out there making some awesome crossover game and rewriting Halo and ME at the same time.\*\*

\*\*\*\*A/N: For those who are interested: I need Original Characters who can service as Artificial Intelligences in the story for each ship. (This will later be implemented at one point in the story) As each AI is based off of some kind of person or thing, it shouldn't be too outrageous, and your entry should include:\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*Name of the AI/who he/she/it is based off of\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*Name of ship they serve on\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*Basic Personality traits and notable facts/features/skills\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*In theory, I could just write all of this myself (And I'm starting to), but it is so much more fun and of a challenge to hear other peoples ideas and see if I can figure them out. Enjoy the story!\*\*\*\*

They cleared out the Geth easily enough, gunning them down and quickly slamming the button, causing the tram to lurch forward, buckling under the weight of 7 super soldiers. Cortana estimated that it would take five or ten minutes to get to the other end, so the Spartans all busied themselves with checking their weapons, ammunition, and armor, like always. He could tell that their new "Friends" were a little uncomfortable seeing them clean up and check their equipment with the practiced ease they had, until Commander Shepard " who had seemed to talk the most out of all of them - decided to break the silence. "Look, as grateful as I am that you helped us, what are you guys really? Like, you guys' don't-

>"We're human. Trust us."<p>

"Really? Is there any way you couldâ€¦prove it to us?" Shepard asked.

John looked at his squad mates, who all nodded slightly in his direction, and he sighed. He reached for his helmet, and he pulled it off with barely a sound. The others did the same, and the first thing Ashley, Shepard and Kaidan all noticed was how pale they all seemed to be. They were definitely human, but that singular quality made them look like living ghosts. Except for that, however, and some of their hair that seemed beyond a standard military length, they looked like any other group of ordinary soldiers, so common that if Shepard were to walk away right now she would have difficulty remembering their faces.

"Satisfied?" John asked bluntly. Shepard nodded, and as one the Spartans put their helmets back on, and John continued, "Look, this is also a first contact situation for us, so for now we need you to trust us."

What John didn't tell Shepard was that he and the rest of the expeditionary force already knew far more than they did about them than they knew about the UNSC. The reason Cortana had remained silent during much of the fighting was that she had been combing through any and all information about their new allies. She had been sending various images to everyone's helmet feeds of profiles of Shepard, her two comrades, and anybody of import related to them. They knew, for example, that Shepard and Kaidan were assigned aboard the SSV Normandy, something that vaguely sounded like an ONI prowler but with a lower level of technology. When they asked the Infinity to scan for it, they picked it up not because of their heat signature (Which was hidden) but simply because of the high levels of strange energy coming from seemingly nowhere, which they narrowed down to one constant location.

What John and consequently the rest of the Spartans were interested in was the service record of Shepard. She had some extensive training â€" the Spartans likened the N7 training to a mixture of Spartan and ODS training â€" but she was quite a character. First, in 2176, an event known as the Skyllian Blitz occurred, in which Shepard single-handedly closed a gap in the breach when the invading Batarian pirates broke through the colonies defenses. Another significant event was the Akuze attack, when Shepard ended up being the sole survivor of a major Thresher Maw attack in 2177, with her entire team wiped out in a single night. The final and most recent event of note was the attack on Torfan in 2178, a brutal massacre in which Shepard had cemented her reputation not only as a war hero, but also the controversial title of "The Butcher of Torfan," a title earned when she ordered most of her squad to their deaths.

In short, Cortana had decided to come up with a general summary of the character in front of them; a soldier through and through, who would be willing to personally risk their life for innocent ones, and although she seemed to care about her fellow squad mates, at the same time she was also a tough and brutal commander who wasn't afraid to send people to their deaths. Chief and Blue team had heard this all before; There had been many commanders that most of them had met or even served under similar ones. The harsh reality of being at war for over twenty-seven years meant that at some point or another sacrifices had to be made, and off the top of their heads they could easily name many tremendous sacrifices made by many servicemen, both

ordinary and extraordinary, so that humanity might have lived a little longer to finish the fight.

The tram stopped, and the teams silently took formation and moved out.

**\*\*Meanwhile, on the \*\*\*\*\_Eternal's \_\*\*\*\*Bridge\*\***

Miranda Keyes, Admiral and commanding officer for the UNSC \_Eternal, had been quietly sitting while reading the "Codex" on a data pad with one hand and drinking some simulation or sim-coffee in the other. Yes, it was crap compared to the real thing, yes, Miranda also had a stash of \_real\_ coffee beans secreted away in her quarters, and yes, if anyone found out she would inevitably be out by the end of the week, but on the bright side the caffeine kept her awake and alert, and alert was the word of the day for the entire fleet; they knew that any of the sentient species they had been updating themselves about could react in any way to them, from peaceful greeting to yet another war, from which she and the fleet were planning to make a tactical retreat back through the portal. Currently she and the rest of the fleet captains and major leaders were all debating on just how to reveal themselves. They knew that with luck saving the colony would increase their standings, but again they didn't quite know what would happen. Although every ship in the entire expeditionary force had been equipped with the best technology could offer, including state of the art cloaking systems, they knew that the cat would have to be let out of the bag at some point. Besides, contact had already been made with a few human soldiers, who thankfully had been accepting the help of the Spartans, but the question about their higher ups remained unanswered. Although one of the objectives of their mission was to "Establish peaceful relations with any unknowns/aliens you meet on the other side," old habits for much of the crew tended to die hard, and while Humanity and the Elites have managed to form a healthy relationship, many crewmen and ground forces were all hardened veterans in the "Great War," as many called it.

Personally, Miranda couldn't blame them. Many had friends and family they had lost to aliens, and those prejudices can be hard to erase, even for the stupidest of reasons. She herself had lost her father to the war, and it also drove herself away from her mother. While she and Halsey were on shaky terms at best, and nobody save a select few actually knew their relationship, they had begun quietly talking to each other once more. It was still limited to just a few conversations here and there and an exceedingly long email chain (Which Miranda repeatedly told Halsey to delete and send her a short text to her data pad instead), partially because with the nanites running through everyone's bodies Catherine and Miranda looked the exact same age, and the resemblances between them had become exceedingly obvious to even the casual observer; they both had that confident stride, the same facial features and hairstyle, the piercing gaze that has scared away many potential admirers, and that kind of commanding air that almost said "Let us talk science" or "Let us fuck shit up" respectively.

Just as she was about done with her brooding, a deck officer called out, "Admiral, we have a ship exiting the atmosphere of the planetâ€¦I think you can guess which one it is." The deck officer sent a live recording to the holographic table, and she could see a miniature mechanical version of something that looked like a cross



between a cuttlefish and a starfish, but what bothered her the most were the tentacles that had vaguely come to represent the horrifying "Stalks" that often protruded from Flood victims. Miranda had thankfully never had to face the terrifying foes in combat, but she had seen the classified videos of the actual mutation process, and most terror inducing of all was something directly from the Master Chief's helmet cam, one of him coming into contact with some kind of "Proto-Gravemind" that had her fathers face twisted into an agony nobody should ever have to go through. She was seeing the horrible spikes that those machines had deployed in her head, seeing the people on them being turned into husks beyond any human recognition in her head.

Nothing in her wanted more to blast that god-forsaken machine to smithereens and be done with it, and she usually knew that it was best to trust her gut instinct, but it felt like there was \_something\_ trying to stop her. Every time she tried to order the guns to go full blast on the ship, a subtle buzzing sound tried to wash over her, attempting to whisper to her not to, so quiet that she would nearly forget about it and the urge to order a firing solution, but literally her entire body was fighting against it. The nanites in her and the simple patterns in her brain that were different compared to humans in this universe due to the fact that they simply \_weren't\_ the original humans had completely failed to comply with the unknown force, and it seemedâ€| surprised. There was also something else, something hidden deep inside thisâ€|Reclaimer, something that confused 'it' to an enormous proportion.

"Get. The. Hell. Out of my mind," Miranda snapped to nobody in particular, and if she were to explain it to anybody else she would describe it as mentally lashing out at her attacker, kicking and shouting and screaming at 'it' as it cowered away in a newfound fear that 'it' had never felt before, mercilessly beaten back by this completely unknown powerful mental force. She finally managed to get herself to break away from the hologram, and she snapped into her usual confident, battle ready self again. "Have we got a firing solution on that thing yet?"

"Ma'am, we already got the ship lined up in our sights, and we're waiting on your word."

Miranda smiled, as somewhere in the back of her head she knew that \_thing\_ was responsible for what she just felt, and now she was going to get a little payback. "De-cloak and fire the main guns, will you? Lets make sure to give this ship a warm welcome." The \_Eternal\_ was equipped with the brand new MACs, which were the top of the line, reverse-engineered Forerunner tech, so powerful that the only other times they have been fired in anger were at the occasional Flood-infested world the UNSC would run into during their expeditions, and were famously known to clear entire continents of life. To say the least, she was interested to see what would happen when they hit this new target.

The hum became noticeable throughout the ship, which many UNSC personnel affectionately called the sound of an enemy "About to kiss their ass goodbye."

**\*\*Around the same time, SSV Normandy\*\***

"\_Ba da da, da da daaa, da dat dum bat da da da do-doo Dee du

Dunnâ€¦" \_Joker quietly sung to himself. It was a tune from an old 20th century jazz song that he often found himself humming to in order to kill time, which to him he found was his main job besides pressing a button here and there. Yes, while the ground team was out there heroically saving the day or whatever, he was stuck here, surfing the extranet and singing to himself. If anyone asked, it was the slow side of piloting the most advanced ship in citadel space, perhaps the galaxy.

That is, of course, until he picked some massive energy readings coming out of nowhere nearby. At first he thought it was from the 2.5 kilometer geth ship he had been quietly observing leaving Eden (which he had orders not to engage â€" not that Joker was suicidal) but the energy readings were coming from somewhere else â€" something so unfathomably powerful that at this point many of the graphs on the \_Normandy\_ simply read "Critical Error". Joker called out to Captain Anderson, "Captain, I think you need to get up here and see this, because we've got some crazy readings here. Like, off the damned charts crazy readings not coming from the geth ship, but from someone or something else."

Within seconds, Anderson purposefully strode to the cockpit, glancing at the several screens now showing errors. "What the hell could do such a thing to our scanners?" he muttered to himself, but Joker overheard and assumed it was a question.

"I don't know, Captain, but whatever it is, it must beâ€¦" Joker trailed off, having just looked out the window and seeing just what had been happening. Anderson was at first baffled by his silence, but he followed Joker's gaze and if it were possible, his jaw would've fallen off.

The ship they saw outside the window was \_massive.\_ It looked like a flying brick with guns, but it was also a gigantic 5-kilometer long ship that made the geth ship look like some private shuttle and the \_Normandy\_ like a mini-scooter. They still watched in absolute shocked silence as the vessel fired a MAC round that went by so quickly that it looked like it was a white beam of light.

And they continued to watch as the ship was nearly torn in half.

**\*\*Sovereign, Same time\*\***

Saren was relatively pleased at how well the attack on Eden Prime had gone. Yes, there had been a few nuisances that he had to deal with, such as that insufferable Alliance team that had come out of nowhere, but overall he had got what he came here for, and it was unlikely that the beacon in its damaged state would reveal any more secrets.

The one thing that he was saddened by was the fact he needed to execute his former friend, Nihlus. Yes, it was deplorable of him to do so, but he convinced himself it was the right thing to do for the greater goodâ€¦ wasn't it?

Shaking the troubling thought away from him, he casually strode to the makeshift captain's chair, which oversaw several geth units and indoctrinated Asari commandos overlooking many different screens. He had watched them progress through the stages of indoctrination,

something he still strove to stay away from â€" At first mistrust and dislike of working with Saren, and then a bubbly eagerness to do anything he said, to a nearly divine worship of both him and Sovereign, and finally to their current state of simple, blank acceptance of whatever task they were assigned. They still retained much of their deadly skill, but they would lack some of the higher up functions of their brainwork such as their tactical ingenuity.

Next to his chair, a young commando â€" Saren didn't remember her name, and didn't bother to ask â€" walked in, a vacant look in her eyes. "Sir, we've detected the buildup of a massive energy that appears to be a weapon. It appears to be targeted straight at us." She said all of this in a completely relaxed voice, as if reporting the weather.

Saren was infuriated that this asari didn't immediately act anyway, but some rational part in him supposed it wasn't her fault. "Well then don't just stand there, you stupid woman! Commence evasive action!"

The entirety of Sovereign tried to vainly move away from the MAC round, but it was wholly in vain. The MAC completely ignored the kinetic barriers, which would normally be suffice to defend against any normal weaponry, and continued to punch through the ship. Had the ship not moved when it did, it would have been completely vaporized due to the MAC hitting the critical Element Zero drive core, but it still did substantial damage. As it was, the MAC had hit just above it and to the left, neatly shearing off the top part of the ship halfway, causing parts to float off haplessly in space. Security systems kicked in, and quickly a compartment seal closed the remaining part of the functioning ship from the vacuum of outer space.

During all of this Saren had been clutching a railing for dear life, which would've been a comical sight were it not for the murderous look in his eyes. "Get us out of here, right now!" He shouted to nobody in particular.

The passive Asari was still standing, completely serene as if she wasn't in mortal peril. "Where would you like to go, sir?"

Saren growled, more annoyed than ever with the indoctrination process. "ANYWHERE BUT HERE, YOU STUPID ASARI â€" his last word was abruptly cut off as the ship immediately processed his command and made a quick jump out of the system, causing him to lose his grip on the railing and slam into a wall, neatly knocking him out.

**\*\*Groundside, shortly after the above events\*\***

Shepard watched in open-mouthed shock at the events unfolding above them that she had seen with a pair of specialized binoculars. They had already disarmed the bombs and cleared the geth from the area, so she watched as the biggest ship she had ever seen â€" completely outclassing anything in the alliance fleet and the geth ship that had taken off earlier â€" fired a round that had cut through the geth ship like a hot knife through butter, causing one part to helplessly drift off into space while the other quickly turned tail and jumped. She turned to the new guys, still almost in a daze, and asked; "So that was the shipâ€" she was unable to finish, her mind still

processing what she had just seen.

"One of them." Alice replied, noncommittally shrugging her shoulders.

"You guys have \_more \_ships?" Kaidan asked incredulously, also shocked by what he had seen.

"There is only one other like that, but some 54 others are part of our expeditionary force," One SPARTAN Commented. Shepard was about to ask more, but Ashley quickly interrupted.

"Commander, We've located the beacon." She said over the COM, and quickly Shepard made her way to it, which seemed to radiate some sort of green mist in her eyes.

"\_Normandy\_, we need a pickup. We've found the beacon and a few friends as well" She said, slowly walking around.

Kaidan, on the other hand, had other ideas. He slowly walked up to the beacon, a sense of awe in him, as the last time such an artifact; humanity had been propelled several years into the future in technology. He slowly moved closer, and suddenly he found himself being drawn in against his will. Shepard noticed, and she quickly ran to shove him out of the way for his safety, only for her to be held up by the artifact as terrible, disjointed visions appeared in her mind. Both Kaidan and Ashley now attempted to help her, but the Spartans pushed her back, insisting it was too dangerous.

The last thing that Shepard heard was her name being called out as she fell to the ground unconscious.

**\*\*Phew! I apologize for lack of recent updates, but I had been playing \*\*\*\*\_The Wolf Among Us\_\*\*\*\* for a while and got sidetracked along with school work and all that. Now, a few questions I've often noticed in the reviews I can answer right away:\*\***

**\*\*\_Mrs. Palmer\_\*\*\*\*: This particular one was something I imagined saying when she was angry at somebody, and as I might have mentioned before to a reviewer this was based off of a nasty habit a middle school teacher I once had who called out one girl who had forgotten to bring in her homework. I am fully aware she is not married.\*\***

**\*\*The Flood/Reaper References: Maybe this makes more sense to some than others. I've seen some do this, others who disagree, but I think that it makes more and more sense as the story progresses (IE using bodies as cannon fodder, biologically as a parasite and with cybernetics respectively)\*\***

**\*\*Spartans in relationships: Say all you want about Spartans having reduced sex drives or whatever, that doesn't mean that they're completely oblivious to each others feelings. I imagined the pair of Fred/Linda to be more of a friendly relationship that was formed in the heat of battle and camaraderie of years together as a team. No, I am not accepting requests for pairings, simply because I am not a romance writer, it's just a detail I put on the side.\*\***

**\*\*Disgust at Powell: Alright, so this was an out-of-character writing thing, but more of a personal thing. I always hated the fact that**

this one, lazy-ass dockworker who slept on the job (And also in a side-quest turns out to be a member of a smuggling ring) is the only survivor when I'm sure there were plenty of braver people who deserved the chance to live. My bad for putting it in there, but whatever.\*\*

\*\*Other than that, I'm still open to any other feedback you might have - Feel free to chew me out all you want for any writing errors or lore errors, but keep it clean!\*\*

\*\*ZyZhang7\*\*

## 5. Interlude

\*\*Unidentifiable Location, ME universe\*\*

"So what do we know about them?"

The Illusive Man, staring at the various updates coming in live from their spy on the Normandy sighed deeply, the smoke from his cigarette dispersing in the air. "We were too hasty with the last ones; we reacted too harshly, and it cost us." He said, more to himself than his companion. He didn't mention that "The last ones" were only a three-man strong team in some type of stealth cruiser, yet they had managed to kill 50 of his best men in a furious gunfight and cripple the ships around it when they detonated themselves with what appeared to be nuclear weapons onboard. They did not survive, and Cerberus had gained little information save for what their troops on the ship had observed before being killed.

"You didn't answer my question." Miranda said, her crossed arms the only hint of impatience. She knew that the answers would either come in time or not at all, but for something this important she felt like she had to know.

The Illusive Man was silent for a few moments, the only sounds being him tapping away on the holographic keyboards. "They're some kind of military or paramilitary group calling themselves the UNSC, which we have yet to determine what it actually stands for save for some sort of "United Nations", as the first two letters imply. Their first ship we encountered was a stealth vessel that had amazingly developed the ability to turn completely invisible, even to the human eye. Although they still used projectile-based bullets, they managed to kill some of our best when they appeared next to one of our bases â€" and then they detonated several nuclear devices, which had the force of several megatons and destroyed or crippled many of our ships â€" and the base â€" in the area. But most importantly, they're human, if the reports are to go by anything, and there was no traces of Element Zero onboard their vessel. Before you ask, yes, I have checked, and nobody has managed to create technology that advanced in the entire galaxy. We have not idea where they're from or why they're here, but now we have units and ships over five and a half kilometers long calling themselves the UNSC, and I don't think it's a coincidence."

Miranda processed all this information, secretly surprised, but she filed it all away in her mind while keeping an impassive face. "And what do we plan to do?"

The Illusive Man inhaled and sighed deeply, the smoke puffing out yet again. "What we always do. We watch, we observe, we wait. These people could be the wildcard here, no past and no motives that we know of. They have ships that can cloak and ships that are over five kilometers long that can gut ships larger than dreadnoughts in one shot â€" what other technological marvels and secrets do they have? With the right words or actions, we could have invaluable allies should we play our cards right. And when we do meet them face to face, I want you to be there." He was certain in his choice â€" many of his other operatives would likely lack the diplomatic tact and instincts that would be crucial in this meeting, and Miranda was his best bet â€" it may not have been a lot, but he trusted her enough for this assignment, and he was confident that she would be successful.

"Yes Sir."

\*\*So I'm not dead. I promise. It's just that school and homework have been annoying as crazy for the past few months, and I feel like I should let you guys know that I was still working on this.\*\*

\*\*It's a pity because I was really hoping to work that lone prowler more into the plot, but eventually I couldn't find a way to fit it in, and I figured that this was the best way I could explain it, and how Cerberus would have previous knowledge of the UNSC.\*\*

\*\*Promise to get back to you guys soon! You guys have been awesome to me and my story! Sorry that this was so short!\*\*

\*\*And yes, I did change this story to a T-Rated story. Maybe because I figured that I wasn't going to go X rated or anything and seeing that I wasn't much of a swearer, I figured it would be safe to lower it.\*\*

End  
file.